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Fresh cheating laid to Soviets on SALT

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The United States has uncovered evidence of substantial new Soviet violations of the SALT II agreement, including the potential to double the throw-weight of its missile force through technological innovation, it was learned yesterday from U.S. military and intelligence sources.

The sources also said that there are indications that Soviet officials at the Geneva START talks on limiting strategic nuclear missiles will refuse to set a date to return to the negotiating table after the present cycle has ended for the holidays. The talks are due to wind up today.

In effect, the sources said, this would amount to a Soviet walkout. The Soviets last month quit talks with the United States on intermediate-range missiles after the West German Parliament agreed to deploy U.S. cruise and Pershing II missiles as part of NATO's modernization program.

The SALT II treaty was agreed upon in June 1979 but has not been ratified. However, President Reagan publicly committed the United States to abiding by its terms so long as the Soviet Union does too.

The sources said there have been five major developments in the ongoing debate over Soviet compliance with the strategic arms limitation treaty. These include:

- The unprecedented, and pre-

viously undisclosed, admission by Soviet officials of two Soviet violations of the SALT II agreements.

On Nov. 22 Soviet generals, meeting in Geneva at the SALT Standing Consultative Commission, admitted for the first time that they already had deployed more missile launchers capable of carrying multiple warheads than the SALT II ceiling allowed. The agreement allows for deployment of no more than 1,200 such "MIRVed" launchers.

The generals also admitted that they had deployed more heavy bombers equipped with long-range cruise missiles than the 1,320 SALT II agreement provided.

U.S. intelligence analysts previously had suspected these violations, but the admissions came as something of a surprise, the sources said. "They came right out and admitted it on their own," said one source. "It appeared to be an act of contempt or defiance of U.S. concerns," he added.

- The satellite sighting in August of two squadrons of Soviet Backfire bombers at long-range airforce bases in Arctic staging bases. This indicates the proposed use of the Backfires as intercontinental bombers.

- The discovery that the Soviets are producing 36 to 40 Backfire bombers each year, when former Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev wrote in his agreement that no more than 30 per year would be produced.

- The detection since June 1983 of five tests of a new type of submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) with a throw-weight in violation of SALT II accords.

This new SLBM, designated by U.S. intelligence as SSN-X-23, is estimated to have a greater throw-weight than that of the SS-19 intercontinental ballistic missile,

which is about 6,600 pounds. This is a violation of Article 9 of the SALT II agreement.

The sources also said that the Soviets apparently have achieved the increase through the use of improved propellants and the doing away with a fourth-stage "post-boost vehicle," which would normally contain the missile's warhead and guidance electronics. Instead, the payload and guidance are installed in the third stage, allowing the increase in throw-weight.

If this upgrading were to be applied to all Soviet land- and sea-based missiles, the sources said, it would effectively double the throw-weight capability of the entire Soviet missile force.

On the issue of the Backfire bombers, the sources reported that since 1977 the Soviets have operated Backfire bombers from Arctic bases at Olenagorsk, on the Kola Peninsula near Murmansk, a location ideally suited for potential Soviet operations against Europe. These Backfires were naval-oriented, intended for strikes against NATO naval formations, so they were not believed to be a SALT II violation.

But with the recent evidence from U.S. reconnaissance satellites of Backfires at long-range staging bases deeper in the Arctic, their use as intercontinental bombers, with a capability of quickly striking all of the United States, was confirmed.

The sources said it was virtually certain that the Reagan administration would soon make full disclosure of the Soviets' SALT II violations. While no date was mentioned, it is expected to occur around the time Congress reconvenes in January.